

Weekend Tribune 20-21 September 2003

Book puts Bulawayo on the Map

By Miriam Madziwa

BULAWAYO – Bulawayo is Zimbabwe’s cultural capital. And the recently published *Short Writings from Bulawayo* by ’amaBooks reaffirms that status.

Short Writings from Bulawayo is an anthology of short stories and poems that all have something to say about the City of Kings. Twenty-three mostly unpublished writers contributed the 29 articles that feature in the 134-page book. Reading through the articles, one gets a detailed picture of life in Bulawayo and its environs as seen and interpreted by the different authors. The writers touch on a variety of issues that include incest, queues, the history of bicycles in the city, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Highlanders Football Club and the Vapostori women who have sprouted all over the city.

The writers see things differently. For example, writing about the women who deal in foreign currency, two authors describe them as follows:

“As he nears Highlanders Sports Club, he wonders why there are so many Vapostori women in the streets, so many of them. Maybe they are praying for the country?” writes Masimba Manyonga in *A Seed of Hope*.

Peter Hutton in *Ever Smart* describes the women in white thus: “... Apostolic Faith ladies, gleaming white and so innocent, twirl their parasols and whisper “money change?” as if offering illicit sex.”

The contributors, including John Eppel, Pathisa Nyathi, Mzana Mthimkhulu, Terence Ranger, Shirley Tarr, Masimba Manyonga and Judith Maphosa, use different writing styles which the editor, Jane Morris, skilfully retains to give an individual feel to each piece.

My favourite story from the collection is *The Queue* by Bryony Rheam. In the piece Rheam tackles issues of loneliness among old white Zimbabweans and how they are trying to cope with the turbulent economic environment in the face of insistent demands from their domestic staff and skyrocketing prices of goods and services.

Another brilliant piece is *The Witch* by Farai Mpfu. The story looks at the contentious issue of witch hunting. How unscrupulous community leaders use women – especially those who are widowed and single – as scapegoats.

Short Writings from Bulawayo is an enjoyable book that should appeal to readers with varied tastes and interests. It is a book that children and adults alike can read anywhere. As Morris says, in selecting the pieces to include, she tried to ensure that there was “something for everyone” in the book. For those who find themselves stuck in long winding queues, the book will help kill time and take the stress from queuing.

The book is a pleasure to read.